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# The JOURNAL of OPEDA

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Strengthening professionalism among employees of the U.S. Department of Agriculture

Volume 1, No. 1

April 1983

## MESSAGE FROM SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE BLOCK

Congratulations to OPEDA on the inauguration of its first professional journal. It will be an important addition to the organization's other valuable forms of communication. I am honored to play a role in the beginning of The Journal of OPEDA.

There has never been a more important time in OPEDA's 54-year history for professionals in government service. We could not adequately serve the people of the United States without such dedicated professionalism.

The title of your organization says it well: The Organization of Professional Employees of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. A proud title with a proud heritage of service!

The continuing value of OPEDA is evident not only from your innovative initiatives but from your increasing membership, as well.

Best wishes and warm regards for every success in the years ahead.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John R. Block". The signature is fluid and cursive, with "John" and "R." on the first line and "Block" on the second line.

## STATEMENT BY OPEDA PRESIDENT THOMPSON

On this 54th anniversary of the founding of OPEDA, we are pleased to present this first issue of The Journal of OPEDA. We are grateful to Secretary Block for his message.

Future issues of The Journal of OPEDA, which will be published once or twice a year to start, will be devoted to professionalism, public service, and protection and improvement of the Civil Service System.

This is the 100th anniversary of that System, a public service unsurpassed worldwide in consistent, efficient performance. Regrettably, during the last several years the top leadership of this System has permitted a steady encroachment of partisan political influence in the administration of government programs and management of Federal employees. We will do whatever we can to prevent further degradation of the System.

This is a major challenge for members of OPEDA and of other professional employee organizations. We launch this Journal as one way of meeting this challenge.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Otoe G. Thompson". The signature is cursive and fluid.

ORGANIZATION OF PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYEES OF THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

OFFICE: Room 1414 South Building, USDA, Washington, D.C. 20250

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#### OPEDA FOUNDED BY TOP USDA OFFICIALS

The names of persons who organized OPEDA sound like an early "Who's Who" of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

On April 8, 1929, representatives from the various bureaus (as program agencies were called then) and offices voted to adopt a constitution for the newly established Organization of Professional Employees of the United States Department of Agriculture.

Their choice for President was Albert F. Woods, Director of Scientific Work in USDA. Before joining the Department staff, Dr. Woods had been President of Maryland State College of Agriculture, which later became the University of Maryland. The Vice President of OPEDA was C. C. Clark, Assistant Chief of the Weather Bureau, which was part of USDA at that time.

The Executive Committee for this new professional organization included: Milton S. Eisenhower, Director of Information; Roy Headley, Assistant Forester, Forest Service; Henry G. Knight, Chief, Bureau of Chemistry and Soils; Ruth O'Brien, Chief, Textile and Clothing Division, Bureau of Home Economics; E. W. Sheets, Chief, Animal Husbandry Division, Bureau of Animal Industry; and W.W. Stockberger, Director of Personnel and Business Administration.

Many of you will remember Dr. Milton S. Eisenhower as the youngest brother of former President Dwight D. Eisenhower. After several years with USDA, he was named President of Kansas State University, then Pennsylvania State University, then Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, where he now lives. Also, some may recall that Dr. W.W. Stockberger built USDA's Personnel Office to the point of being rated the best in the Federal Government. Others on the Executive Committee also were prominent in their respective disciplines.

What brought these leaders together and prompted them to establish a professional organization was a series of problems with the Classification Act of 1923 and amended in 1928, a need to liberalize the retirement system, and a desire to improve the image of professional employees. Their goal was to find ways to promote the interests of employees "through organized and concerted effort."



Dr. Albert F. Woods, First President of OPEDA

#### CHRONOLOGY OF MAJOR STEPS IN OPEDA'S HISTORY

- April 8, 1929 - Constitution Adopted by USDA Leaders.
- 1948 - First Issue of Newsletter Published. Executive Officer Named. Code of Ethics Adopted.
- 1958 - Vice Presidents Appointed for Professionalism, Public Service, and Economic Matters.
- 1965-69 - 68 Chapters of OPEDA Chartered.
- 1974 - National Council System Established.
- 1979 - 50th Anniversary Observed with First Professional-of-the-Year Award.
- 1983 - First Issue of The Journal of OPEDA. Membership Reaches Record High.

## RESEARCH PERSONNEL EVALUATION IN ARS

One of the most successful plans for classifying and evaluating scientists is the Research Personnel Evaluation System (RPES), which has been used in the Agricultural Research Service for nearly 25 years. It has been used as a model in several other government agencies (Federal and State) and by a number of foreign governments.

RPES is based on a Research Grade-Evaluation Guide developed by ARS in the late 1950s to provide an equitable system of pay for research scientists within the principles of classification in the Federal Service. It was officially adopted by the Civil Service Commission (now OPM) in 1950.

In ARS, evaluations are conducted by panels with classification authority to review and rate research positions. The panels have a mix of research, personnel, and management expertise. Research representatives are chosen from established "peer groups." A peer group consists of scientists engaged in similar fields of research. Scientists who are being reviewed may designate their own peer group choice.

All research scientist positions are reviewed within a 3 to 5-year cycle, depending on grade levels. The primary basis for a review is a "case" prepared and submitted by the scientist being reviewed. This document includes a description of the research assignment and personal data which show the scientist's qualifications, stature, and impact of accomplishments.

After reaching its decision on a case, the panel prepares a report giving its rationale for the rating and its observations and recommendations to the scientist and line management. There also is a mandatory requirement for a discussion of the panel's findings between the immediate supervisor and the scientist.

The Research Personnel Evaluation System is effectively utilized in ARS not only as a classification system but as a management tool to motivate and challenge research scientists to their individual potential and equitably recognize and reward them for their research contributions. About 2,600 ARS scientists in Grades 11 to 15 are under this system. (Our thanks to Dan Ellerman of ARS Personnel for providing the above information.)

## DECISION ON SCS TECHNICIAN SERIES DUE SOON

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) is expected to announce its decision in the next few months on new standards for Soil Conservation Technician Series, GS-458, which applies to about 3,000 technicians in the Soil Conservation Service.

SCS officials have been trying for several years to have that series combined with GS-457, Soil Conservation Series, or otherwise give technicians more opportunities for advancement. Present limit for most of the technicians is GS-6 grade. A few are GS-7.

In support of the SCS recommendations, OPEDA wrote to the OPM Standards Development Center June 24, 1981, urging that the two series be combined and thus provide higher grade possibilities for technicians plus eliminating the terms "professional" and "subprofessional" from the separate series. We cited one example of a technician being in Grade 6 for 18 years.

OPM issued Tentative Standards for the GS-458 (Technician) series in October 1982 after a study of many positions in both series in several of the states. They did not include combining the two series, but did propose adding Grades GS-8 and GS-9 to the 458 series.

Another letter from OPEDA was sent to OPM November 24, 1982, expressing regret that the two series were not combined in the Tentative Standards, but commended the agency for their proposed addition of Grades 8 and 9 to the career ladder.

Another proposal in the Tentative Standards was to provide opportunities for two-grade interval promotion of technicians transferring from the GS-458 to GS-457 Series, after some additional college courses. Requirements for the additional training include 30 semester hours of agriculture and natural resources credits with at least 12 hours of agronomy and soils courses in order to qualify for such transfers.

We anticipate that the proposed revisions in the Tentative Standards will be adopted in the final decision by OPM. It would be a major breakthrough of a promotion problem SCS has had for many years in the management of soil conservation technicians.

## OPEDA'S PROFESSIONAL-OF-THE-YEAR AWARD WINNERS, 1979-1982

### AWARD PROGRAM STARTED ON 50TH BIRTHDAY

Keystone to its program of professionalism is OPEDA's Professional-of-the-Year Award, which has been presented annually to one of its outstanding members, starting with the 50th Anniversary celebration in 1979.

Chapters and individual OPEDA members are invited to present nominations to the National Office each year and a five-member panel selects the top three nominations. Those three nominations then are sent to all Members of OPEDA's National Council whose votes determine the winner.

OPEDA officers are proud of the records of winners honored during the last four National Council meetings in Washington. Each year's winner is brought to the Council meeting, with all expenses paid by OPEDA, and is presented a plaque in recognition of the honor at a Sunday evening dinner opening the Council meeting.

### FIRST WINNER WAS HILDA JUNG (ARS)



Hilda Jung, a Research Physicist, had 35 years of service with the ARS Southern Regional Research Laboratory when she won OPEDA's first Professional-of-the-Year Award in 1979. Her record of service gained her wide recognition, including being in Who's Who of American Women.

Her biography also appeared in Leaders in American Science, Dictionary of International Biography, The Two Thousand Women of Achievement, and American Men of Science.

Her work in USDA dealt primarily with research in cotton and other fibers. She was honored by many professional societies and she presented papers on her research at a long list of national meetings of chemists and other scientists.

Mrs. Jung received a B.S. degree in Mathematics and Physics from H. Sophie Newcomb College, Tulane University, and participated in many short courses in organic chemistry, polymer chemistry, statistics, rapid reading, and technical writing.

She was President of the New Orleans No. 1 Chapter of OPEDA in 1978, and has continued her interest in the Organization since she retired in 1979. In fact, she is now serving a second round as President of the New Orleans Chapter.

### CHARLES HARPER (SCS) WON IN 1980



This winner is what you might call a real "down-to-earth" professional. He is Area Conservationist (SCS), Ozark, Alabama. Even though he has been offered higher-ranking positions in the agency, he has chosen to stay and continue working with farmers and community leaders in his native Alabama.

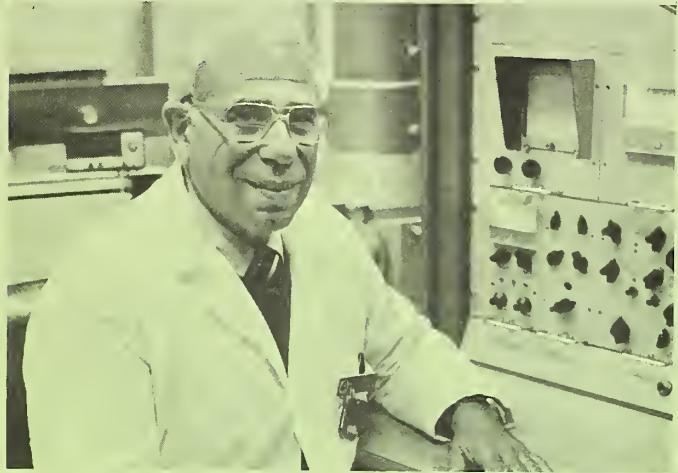
He had decided as a boy on a poor Piedmont farm that he wanted to work for the Department of Agriculture. That is what he has done, for 35 years, after attending Auburn University on a football scholarship and graduating with a B.S. degree in Agriculture.

Charles Harper is a highly respected leader in his community and works closely with farmers, youth, businessmen, educators, and legislators in the interest of conservation. He helped to organize the first chapter of OPEDA in June 1963 and has served as an officer of it repeatedly. It is the Southeast Alabama Chapter, one of the smallest in OPEDA, which has steadily served its members well.

### IRVING B. SACHS (FS) WAS 1981 WINNER

The 1981 winner of OPEDA's annual Professional Award was Dr. Irving B. Sachs, Research Forest Products Technologist at the Forest Products Laboratory operated by USDA's Forest Service at Madison, Wisconsin. Dr. Sachs had achieved worldwide recognition for his research on the efficiency of converting wood pulp, derived from secondary wood species and recycled paper, to fiber-based products in containers for shipping consumer goods.

Dr. Sachs received B.S., M.S., and Ph.D. degrees from the University of Illinois, and did cancer research in commercial laboratories before joining USDA in 1958. He has been a member of OPEDA since 1967, and is now National Council Member for Wisconsin and Minnesota.



In accepting the OPEDA award at the National Council meeting in October 1981, Dr. Sachs offered these observations:

"Professionalism is not attained simply by receiving a degree, putting a sign on your door, obtaining a license, or joining an association. True professionalism depends not only on knowledge and high competence but also involves relations with other persons.

"It requires that a person be responsibly aware of the impact of his or her work on others and on society in general."

#### COUNCILWOMAN RUTH BENERITO WON IN 1982

Dr. Ruth R. Benerito, who has distinguished herself as Research Leader in Physical Chemistry at the ARS Southern Regional Research Center in New Orleans, received last year's Professional-of-the-Year Award.

She received a B.S. degree in Chemistry from H. Sophie Newcomb College; M.S. in Physics from Tulane University; and Ph.D. in Physical Chemistry from University of Chicago.

Dr. Benerito has received many honors during her 30 years of research in the Southern Region of the Agricultural Research Service. They include USDA's Distinguished Service Award twice (1964 and 1970); Southern Chemist Award; the Garvan Medal, highest honor for a woman chemist given by the American

Chemical Society; Federal Women's Award of the U.S. Civil Service Commission; and Outstanding Federal Employee of the New Orleans area.



ARS Administrator Terry B. Kinney, Award Winner Ruth Benerito, and OPEDA President Otis N. Thompson, Jr.

Her research has dealt primarily with establishing the role of catalysts in preparation of easy-care cotton materials and development of new theories of crease resistance in cottons. She also is noted for her job-related counseling of younger scientists and is a popular lecturer on the interactions of science and society before civic groups as well as scientific audiences.

In accepting the 1982 Professional Award, Dr. Benerito spoke eloquently on "Science, Society, Politics, and Professionalism." (Copies of her speech are available from the National Office.) Below are her remarks on professionalism.

"Professionalism is a nobility of excellence for its own sake. We should be dedicated to excellence by that extra measure of sincere effort--regardless of remuneration. However, it does not preclude fiscal awareness on the part of women who, regardless of training or experience, still receive less money than men of equal training and experience. Neither does it preclude vigorous pursuits of appropriate remuneration for women who are in vocations traditionally held by women. It does preclude half-done work by disgruntled people. OPEDA needs to take an active part and speak out on such matters--for example, why can't some capable women secretaries become administrative assistants?"

#### STATEMENT BY ARS ADMINISTRATOR KINNEY

At the annual dinner, Dr. Terry B. Kinney, Administrator of the Agricultural Research Service, congratulated Dr. Benerito and added the following remarks about OPEDA:

"I have been a member of OPEDA for several years (since 1969), and I believe strongly in what the Organization does for USDA employees.

"Professionalism applies to many disciplines. There are professional organizations for most of the varied disciplines in the Department of Agriculture. They include societies of foresters, soil conservationists, agronomists, economists, scientists, and others from the multiple and varied branches of science and agriculture.

"We need, and must have, a high degree of professionalism among our scientists. In addition, we need a professionalism of more general type that can serve the thousands who also deserve the professional label.

"OPEDA is unique in that it encompasses the broadest spectrum of professionalism in the Department of Agriculture. It has members in all of the agencies and in practically all disciplines. It has a long and proud history of service in USDA."

#### ADDITIONAL COPIES OF JOURNAL AVAILABLE

This first issue of The Journal of OPEDA has two major purposes. One is to establish a vehicle that will bring to all OPEDA members and other readers more information on activities in and views on professionalism and public service in the Department of Agriculture and elsewhere.

The other is, specifically for this issue, to give all of us in OPEDA a better understanding of its beginning and the progress it has made in its 54 years.

We welcome your suggestions of topics that should be covered in future issues of The Journal of OPEDA.

We are having a thousand extra copies of the Journal printed. Let us know if you would like a copy or more to give to associates.

#### HATCH ACT REFORM NOW BEING PROPOSED

Every few years there has been an effort to amend the Hatch Act and thus allow Federal classified employees "greater measure of political freedom." Since such an effort is being made again with H.R. 81 and H.R. 82, it is well to review what OPEDA has said before.

In testimony before the House Civil Service Subcommittee opposing the "Federal Employees Political Activities Act of 1977," OPEDA's representative said on February 24:

"Our Organization is opposed to any major changes in the Hatch Act which would appreciably lessen its restrictions on political activities of professional classified employees.

"We see no justification for amending the Hatch Act at this time. It has effectively protected the Nation's millions of civil servants for nearly 40 years. It has been a safeguard against involuntary involvement of career classified employees in political campaigns throughout its history.

"The membership of OPEDA supported passage of the Hatch Act in 1939, testified strongly for it before the Political Activity Commission in 1969, and opposed changes in it as recommended in H.R. 3000 in 1975.

"Professional employees are grateful for the protection afforded by the Hatch Act, and they are not unmindful of their political responsibilities to our Nation. They do not shirk these responsibilities. Career employees are proud to vote and to support the candidates of their choice. What they don't want is being told by a supervisor how to vote or whom to support.

"We fear the insidious tactics which some supervisors may use if the so-called 'greater political freedom' is granted. There are many subtleties of political pressure which can be used in governmental offices."

That will be the sense of OPEDA testimony against revising the Hatch Act at hearings this month.

## EXECUTIVES PESSIMISTIC ABOUT GOV'T SERVICE

The Federal Executive Institute Alumni Association (FEIAA) cooperated recently with two renowned academicians--Dr. Warren H. Schmidt, University of Southern California, and Dr. Barry Z. Posner, University of Santa Clara--in a survey to determine values and expectations of public executives.

They found the executives pessimistic about the future of government service as a career.

The survey questionnaire was distributed to 1,400 alumni of the Federal Executive Institute at Charlottesville, Virginia, where government agencies send their top managers and others being groomed for high-level administrative positions. They average about 23 years of government service. More than 800 of them completed and returned the questionnaire.

"Judging from our results," conductors of the survey wrote, "the Civil Service System is in danger of losing its most valuable resource--the high-caliber people necessary to make it work." The report included major findings quoted below.

"Seventy percent of the federal executives questioned said that they would advise bright, competent young people to seek careers in the private sector.

"Fifty-eight percent classified themselves as generally pessimistic about prospects for rewarding government work during the next 10 to 15 years.

"Another 30 percent said they had 'quite mixed feelings' about the future of the public service.

"Only 12 percent felt 'generally optimistic' about prospects ahead.

"Nearly a third of those surveyed said they did not expect to be with their present organizations three years from now.

"The sinking morale seems due to an adverse climate created at the highest levels of the Executive Branch. Our findings indicate that most of the demoralization of the civil service has taken place during the last two presidential administrations."

## PREPARE NOMINATIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL OF 1983

Chapter officers and individual members of OPEDA are encouraged to nominate candidates for the 1983 Professional-of-the-Year Award.

The three specific requirements are that a nominee (1) must be a member of OPEDA, (2) must be an employee of USDA, and (3) must be nominated by an OPEDA chapter or member.

Nominations should include well-written accounts of the nominee's achievements, background, and honors. It also helps to have pictures of the nominee at work and letters of recommendation from supervisors, other officials, and civic leaders.

Principal factors for judging nominations include cost-conscious professionalism which consistently improves program results and encourages similar response in associates; accomplishments which benefit large numbers of the American public or the Nation's natural resources; improvement in professional capability through study and training; and activity in professional organizations.

Nominees must be selected without discrimination as to age, color, creed, discipline, nationality, race, religion, or sex.

Nominations must be submitted by mail or in person by August 15, 1983, to OPEDA National Office, Room 1414, South Building, USDA, Washington, D. C. 20250.

## CODE OF ETHICS FOR OPEDA MEMBERS

OPEDA's Code of Ethics, adopted in 1949, reads as follows:

Courteous, Efficient, and Impartial Service to the American People.  
Loyalty, Faith, and Full Measure of Devoted Service to our Government.  
Courtesy, Fairness, Freedom of Expression, Moral Support, Opportunity, and Recognition to Our Associates.

Here are the names and titles of the four Board Members not listed on page 8: Treasurer--McAlister Bradford (OBPA); National Council Representative--Holly Hayes (ARS); Immediate Past President--Richard G. Ford (ES-ret); Executive Director--Walter W. John (ES-ret.).

## STATUS OF THE ORGANIZATION; ITS AUTHORIZATION

The Organization of Professional Employees of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (OPEDA) has weathered 54 years without a change in its name or in its purposes.

It operates under authority of Federal Personnel Manual (FPM) Chapter 252, approved by the Civil Service Commission in 1977.

OPEDA's organizational pattern was changed in 1975 from field leadership through biennial conventions of chapter presidents to a Council system and annual conferences of its Members. From the beginning, it has had an elected National President and an Executive Committee or Board of Directors as needed.

The National Council is the policy-making body of OPEDA. It consists of 28 Members, each serving OPEDA chapters and members in one or more states, or one of five regions of USDA agencies in the Washington, D.C., area.

The Council meets in Washington each year to determine policies and programs of the Organization for the next year. Members of the Council are employees or retirees who are elected to three-year terms by OPEDA members in the respective regions.

The 11-member Board of Directors, which oversees and helps conduct OPEDA's programs, consists of the National President as Chairman, an Executive Vice President, Vice Presidents for five program areas--Public Service, Professionalism, Membership, Legislation, and Economics--a Treasurer, an elected Representative of the National Council, the immediate past President, and the Executive Director as a non-voting Member. All Members of the Board are located in the Washington area.

All of the above-mentioned officers are elected, except for the immediate past President and the Executive Director. All except the Executive Director serve without compensation. All elected officers are listed in the next column.

The Executive Director, who is employed on an annual contract basis by the President in consultation with the Board, is in charge of the National Office, which carries out OPEDA's programs nationwide. Other members of the National Office staff are Office Manager Helen Storer, who has served OPEDA for 13 years, and Secretary Jacqueline K. Collins (ES-ret.).

## THE OFFICERS AND STAFF OF OPEDA

National President - Otis N. Thompson (ASCS).

Members of the National Council

Region 1 (Alas., Idaho, Wash.), Paul Marz (FS), Juneau, Alas.; Region 2 (Oregon), Jean Gronnert (SCS-ret.), Portland, Oregon; Region 3 (Northern Calif., Nevada), Richard Edwards (ARS), (Council Vice Chairman), Benicia, Calif.; Region 4 (Southern Calif., Hawaii, Guam), Elisabeth Gomez (ARS), Hanford, Calif.; Region 5 (Ariz., New Mexico), Paul Grainger (FS-ret.), Tucson, Ariz.; Region 6 (Colo., Utah, Wy.), Cora Unger (ARS), Ft. Collins, Colo.; Region 7 (Mont., N. Dakota, S. Dakota), Eugene Doering (ARS), (Council Chairman), Mandan, N.D.; Region 8 (Nebr., Iowa), Joseph Haggerty (FmHA), Lincoln, Nebr.; Region 9 (Kansas, Okla.), William Shaklee (CSRS-ret.), Enid, Okla.; Region 10 (Texas), Joseph Matthews (ES-ret.), Austin, Texas; Region 11 (Ark., La.), Ruth Benerito (ARS), New Orleans, La.; Region 12 (Missouri), John Fichter (SCS-ret.), Columbia, Mo.; Region 13 (Minn., Wisc.), Irving Sachs (FS), Madison, Wisc.; Region 14 (Ill., Ind.), Mitchell Hassler (SCS), Indianapolis, Ind.; Region 15 (Ky., Tenn.), Sharon Yocom (FmHA), LaGrange, Ky.; Region 16 (Ala., Miss.), Bill Faulk (SCS), Enterprise, Ala.; Region 17 (Fla., P. Rico), James Honer (FmHA), Gainesville, Fla.; Region 18 (Georgia), Mike Hammer (SRS), Athens, Ga.; Region 19 (North and South Carolina), Frank Jeter, Jr., (SCS-ret.), Raleigh, N.C.; Region 20 (Va., West Va.), Harry Trelogan (SRS-ret.), Arlington, Va.; Region 21 (Mich., Ohio), Dwight Quisenberry (SCS), E. Lansing, Mich.; Region 22 (N.Y., New Eng.), Willie Pittman (SCS), Montour Falls, N.Y.); Region 23 (Pa., N.J.), Robert L. Miller (ARS), Norristown, Pa.; Region 24 (Md., Del.), Dora Hayes (ARS), Beltsville, Md.; Region 25 (Sec.'s Staff, International & Commodity Agencies), Gordon Forsyth (ASCS); Region 26 (Economics, Extension, Research, and Statistics), Charles McDougall (ES-ret.); Region 27 (Food, Consumer, Marketing and Inspection Services), Daniel Swope (AMS-ret.); Region 28 (Natural Resources and Rural Development), Don Lambert (REA).

Board of Directors (other than the President)

Executive Vice Pres. - Ida Cuthbertson (SCS)

Vice Presidents--Professionalism, Roger Neetz (OICD); Public Service, Alan Fusonie (NAL);

Economics, Howard C. Williams (ASCS); Legislation, Eugene Boyles (ASCS-ret.); Membership,

Dwight Gadsby (ERS). (See additional names and titles on page 7).